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RUEHRB/AMEMBASSY RABAT 2118
RUEHTU/AMEMBASSY TUNIS 6975
RUEHTRO/AMEMBASSY TRIPOLI
RUEHNK/AMEMBASSY NOUAKCHOTT 6188
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 ALGIERS 000076

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STATE FOR DRL/IRF WARREN COFSKY

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [KIRF](#) [AG](#)

SUBJECT: CHRISTIAN LEADERS CONCERNED ABOUT RELIGIOUS CLIMATE

REF: ALGERIA 2007 INTERNATIONAL RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

REPORT

Classified By: Deputy Chief of Mission Thomas F. Daughton;
reasons 1.4(b) and (d).

¶1. (C) SUMMARY: One month after a December 11 suicide bomb destroyed UN offices in Algiers, Christian leaders in the country told us that they had experienced no difficulties directly attributable to the attacks. They did express concern, however, that an intolerant climate against Christians is emerging in Algeria. The trend is not officially sanctioned or organized, they believe, but comes from an increasing number of individual actors and actions, some within the government. The religious leaders were unable to pinpoint reasons for the perceived uptick in this behavior. END SUMMARY.

NO DECEMBER 11 AFTERSHOCKS FOR CHRISTIANS

¶2. (C) In individual January 13 and 14 meetings, Henri Teissier (Roman Catholic Archbishop), Roger Correvon (pastor, Protestant Church of Algiers), Pierre Pechoux (president, Seventh Day Adventist Church) and Ali Khedri (Algerian Society for Christian Books) told us that the December 11 suicide bombings in Algiers had not changed the functioning of their churches and that they were experiencing no difficulties directly attributable to the attacks. Teissier, Correvon and Pechoux confirmed that their churches held Christmas services and, in some cases, New Year's activities, without any interference or cause for concern.

SOME TROUBLING BEHAVIOR

¶3. (C) While normal, day-to-day activities for churches have continued since December 11, there is a perception among Christian leaders that an intolerant sentiment towards Christians in Algeria is increasing. Khedri, an evangelical Christian who converted from Islam at age 17 and is now around 50 years old, told us that life for Christians in Algeria was regressing. He said that his organization, the Algerian Society for Christian Books, has been unable to import bibles since 2005, despite repeated and public government declarations that all requests for bible import licenses had been granted. He added that, in secret, the

Society prints bibles and duplicates Christian-themed DVDs in Algeria. He said bibles have also been brought into the country in the luggage of travelers. Khedri showed us a September 26, 2007 letter to the Minister of Religious Affairs in which he noted that while the minister's spokesperson had been quoted in the press September 17 as saying that all licenses had been granted, the Society had not been given permission. To date, Khedri said, he has not received a response to his letter.

¶4. (C) Roman Catholic Archbishop of Algeria Teissier tersely described the difficulties the Roman Catholic church is experiencing, focusing on three main events. First, between May 7 and 15, 2007 he said that a letter was sent advising all Catholic priests in Algeria to leave because they were threatened by AQIM. Teissier said that the letter was stamped with the mysterious "By order of the Director of Studies in charge of the Office of Organization and Orientation (Curricula)", which, he said, is part of the national police, itself a part of the Interior ministry. No such letter was sent to Protestants, Teissier added. Teissier confirmed that no Catholic priest had departed Algeria as a result of the letter, even though some walis (governors) actively encouraged individual priests to do so. Second, Teissier said that in November 2007 four Brazilian Catholics were told to leave Algeria even though their visas and residence cards were valid. Teissier said that no official reason was given for their expulsion, but added that they had been able to obtain a reprieve allowing them to stay at least until June 30, 2008. The Brazilians, part of a group called "Shalom," came to work with members of the Portuguese-speaking Catholic community in Algeria, mostly students from sub-Saharan Africa. Third, Teissier said, for the past two months at least half of the visa requests put

ALGIERS 00000076 002 OF 002

forward by the Church for individuals to come to Algeria have been refused by the Algerian authorities.

TRYING TO CONNECT THE DOTS

¶5. (C) Teissier believes that neither the upper echelons of the Algerian government nor "Islamists" are behind the current difficulties. He posited that elements in military security were acting for reasons he did not understand. The stamp of the office of the "Director of Studies" appears frequently on correspondence that he receives, he noted, yet he has been unable to determine who runs the office. Officially, he said, it is a part of the DGSN (the police). However, when he spoke to DGSN Director Ali Tounsi, Tounsi said that he was unaware of the office's existence. The "Director of Studies," whoever it may be, is acting independently, Teissier concluded. Similarly, Khedri told us he believes that officials in the Ministry of Religious Affairs beneath the level of the minister are blocking the importation of bibles.

¶6. (C) Teissier and Khedri focused their attention on individuals menacing Christian activity in Algeria. For his part, Correvon cautioned that the status of non-Muslims in Algeria must be understood in the context of "dhimmitude", the Islamic system that deals with non-Muslims living under Muslim rule. Correvon said that dhimmitude relegates non-Muslims to an inferior status and cited Algeria's Ordinance 06-03 as an example (ref 2007 IRFR on Algeria). He also said that the Algerian government is legally obligated to protect religious institutions but simultaneously has told some groups that it cannot guarantee their protection.

¶7. (C) COMMENT: In the past, Christian leaders have generally been positive about the experience of their faith communities in Algeria. More recently there appear to be indications that they are not completely welcome here. Recent press reports speak of parliamentarians calling for the government to "slow down the activity of Christian

missionaries" in Algeria and describing a perceived expansion in Christian evangelization in the country as "an important problem". Other recent press reports have detailed a proposed plan to establish a commission that will "fight against Christianization." The individuals with whom we spoke were clear in saying that they did not believe a systematic anti-Christian government campaign was underway. They are nonetheless closely monitoring what they described as the increased actions of a number of shadowy individuals. One possible focal point in this may be the associated evangelical Christian movement, as the Kabylie region has witnessed a steady rise in the number of Muslim converts to evangelical Protestantism. Septel will report on this movement.

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